

**OPENING STATEMENT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE AND NATIONAL  
SECURITY**  
**THURSDAY 20 NOV 2025**  
**MAJOR GENERAL (DSM) MAUREEN O'BRIEN (RETD)**

Good morning Cathaoirleach and members of the Oireachtas. As President of the Association of Retired Commissioned Officers (ARCO) I want to thank you for the invitation to brief this Joint Committee on Defence and National Security on the key issues affecting Defence Forces Veterans.

I am joined today by Comdt Billy Campbell Retd who is also a member of ARCO.

ARCO was founded in 1993, initially to put in place a structure that would formally represent the interests of retired officers, including eligible spouses or civil partners, and children, in particular, to protect the value of military pensions.

While our main focus has always been on pensions, we also engage in a wide range of issues, activities and events. Indeed, because of changes to Officer's pension arrangements, our membership is getting younger and many do not have a pension, consequently the range of issues we address is growing.

ARCO is now a vibrant, evolving and flourishing representative association, providing a strong collective voice, advocating on behalf of retired commissioned officers, who are either fully retired, or who remain active in the workplace with or without a military pension. We have almost 1,000 members.

ARCO encourages and fosters the unique solidarity and comradeship established during military service, and promotes and protects the interests and needs of members, and eligible spouses or civil partners, within its competencies.

Internally, ARCO has provided a forum for analysis and debate, and the formulation of responses to anticipated developments that may impinge on the lives of retired officers.

Externally, we establish and maintain pro-active involvement with kindred organisations and agencies. We provide a member of our Executive Committee to the Defence Forces Benevolent Fund's Executive Committee, the Council of the Alliance of Retired Public Servants as well as Cumann Arachais Oifeagach an Gnath Airm (CAOGA). The primary role of CAOGA is to provide its members

with the means to protect the long-term financial security of the member's family in the event of the death of a key member of the family.

ARCO participates in, or represents retired officers at, State and Defence Forces ceremonial events, both at National, Regional and local levels.

We engage with Government Representatives, Government Departments and Agencies.

We present, within our competencies, presentations, submissions and statements on appropriate issues including Defence, Foreign Affairs, Veteran's Policy, Renumeration, Pensions and Welfare.

The current focus of ARCO is the Advancement of the Combined Veteran's Strategy produced by ARCO, ONE and IUNVA in 2018.

ARCO was delighted to receive a letter from the Tánaiste and Minister for Defence, Simon Harris T.D. confirming that the Office of Veteran's affairs (OVA) was formally established on the 10<sup>th</sup> Nov. After many years of successful advocacy ARCO recognises this decision as having significance across the entire veteran community. We view the establishment of the Office as a commitment to supporting our veterans in recognition of the contribution and service they have made to the State

We look forward to working in partnership with the OVA and the other Veteran's groups to ensure that ex-service personnel receive the support and benefits to which they are entitled.

For the Office of Veterans Affairs to operate effectively, it is now essential that a Veteran's Policy is put in place, in partnership with the recognised veteran representative bodies, Government Departments and State Agencies.

Thank you for providing ARCO with an opportunity to meet with this Committee and we look forward to responding to any questions you may have.